In Response To The Statement By Bishop Kilmer Myers About The Question Of The Ordination Of Women To The Priesthood

When Bishop Myers says that the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood is basically a theological question, he loads his answer apriori by using a Western theology and tradition that is highly paternalistic, hierarchical and one which oscillates inconsistently between demeaning and deifying women.

Furthermore, when he uses Biblical references he falls into the traditional tendency of Western Christendom of reading Scripture literalistically (c/f Ramsey's "archeadogical" versus "organic" critique of Calvin in The Gospel And The Catholic Church, pp. 193-197), in this case claiming we cannot tamper with the imagery of the Bible without endangering the Faith. Before analyzing, briefly, the Bishop's points I should like to suggest that the real issue we face in his statement is not simply a male chauvenist/women's lib conflict, but an argument based on a "conceptual"mind-set rather than a process-view of history. Ecclesiastical tradition is the Bishop's priority.

1.) Is a priest of the Church fundamentally ("whether he likes it or not") a 'God symbol' as Bishop Myers states or a witness to the life and mediation of Jesus as Christ? When the bishop defines the priestly role in this God-way, can he avoid by inference or logic assigning related concepts to the clergyman, such as "paternal", "above", "status", etc.... all of which seem to contradict the Way of the Lord Jesus?

But where has the logic of Bishop Myers gone astray, since it is patently clear both psychologically and sociologically (at least in our day) that "initiative" and "givingness" are in no way either innamtely or necessarily male more than females attributes! Isn't the confusion or logical breakdown to be found in his "second step"... "The male image about God pertains to the divine initiative in creation"? We were always taught in seminary that love not masculinity was the

basis of the creative initiative, and love obviously has no sexual exclusivity. Bishop Myers tries to correct his logic by saying, "This is not an assertion of male superiority" but when he ascribes the "giving-initiating" nature of love to Christ's generative function and then says that this "is plainly a masculine conception" he clearly contradicts his own corrective.

2.) when Bishop Myers then proceeds to tell us that the sexuality of Christ (not Jesus, the man, mind you) is neither an accident nor incidental, what he means is that his masculinity is the point. I think not. That Jesus was a male is a New Testament fact, but hardly its emphasis. Indeed, all of the Evangelists far from relegating women to their "proper role" spend considerable time enhancing their importance at the initiative of Jesus. Now when the bishop moves into a sociological analysis of the Mediterranean in the days of our Lord, one can see many reasons (Jewish tradition, pagan priestesses, the dynamic secular thrust and non-religious orientation of the Gospel, the rigorousness of the John-the-Baptist movement, etc.) why the Apostles were all males, but those appear to be the reasons, not some pre-ordained masculine priority in the divine intention.

3.) Challenging the possible ordination of women to the priesthood on the basis of the "numbers game" in the bishop's third paragraph is not only contradictory to logic and revelation but is exactly the argument used by Rome for so many centuries to justify its edicts post facto (a kind of controlled democratic plurality). Yet here is Bishop Myers calling for a majority show of hands as the criteria of truth and decrying Roman Catholic liberality as a sign that she has forgotten what "catholicity" really means!

4.) It seems to me that the issue is not that the Church has not "adequately

provided" for the ministry of women, but that that is how the clergy (priests and bishops) have so often tended to view the laity as a whole, men and women... as a group to be "adequately provided for" not as the Christian Community within which there are differing functions but where in dialogue and shared power we all have the same ministry and the same Gospel! Women are not seeking to blur sexual differences but to share in the single ministry of the one Church.

5.) (Un-numbered thusly by the bishop, but clearly another point)... Why does the good bishop end up his presentation by running to 'The Mother of the Church'? That is, why does he pull in the divination of Mary at the conclusion of an argument to justify the role of the priest as a male 'God symbol'? Is it to promote and protect a whole hierarchy of ministerial elitism, so that the bishop will give Mary a very exalted position because he wants the clergy a niche closer to God? Seriously, these are of a kind, of the same kind of Western ecclesiology which is still defended as some kind of esse of the Church's life and ministry. Mary bore Jesus in confusion, raised him rather normally and possessively, strongly disagreed with him ideologically, and watched him die without understanding why. She was a woman and a human being who did her best and her worst under trying circumstances and finally "saw the light" and believed. Right on! But let's not deify her simple human response to the Spirit and belief in the Gospel by dehumanizing her with theological abstractions.

Whether women will be allowed to become priests in the Episcopal Church one day or not, it seems to me that the problem isn't a question of defending Apostolic tradition but of living the Apostolic life today. 1971 A.D. is not the same sociological milieu as the year 30 A.D. nor was it possible for either Jesus or Paul to interpret the Faith outside of their milieu. But this is another day. The point

of the Gospel and the role of the Church is to proclaim the Good News in life and word in relation to today's issues. Not everything Biblical is "defended" by not tampering with past imagery or custom, but by remaining faithful to the Holy Spirit in our time. What troubles me most about Bishop Myers' statement is that his concern about past tradition (history) does not lead him to new vision or deeper reflection but to an obsolete defense of an old way. From a kind of Western enclave approach, using questionable logic he can only recommend token adjustments to an outmoded social prejudice about sexual priorities. Christian women in this protest and demand are not confusing "equality" with "identity", rather they are calling into question an ecclesiastical presumption and male exclusiveness similar to those our Lord had the audacity to challenge among the priestly hierarchy in his day.

Philip E. Wheaton, priest

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